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**Constructing Identity in East Berlin:
Housing, Identity, and Power in the GDR**

Max Frank
May 3, 2018

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

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Introduction: Divided Germany

After the end of the Second World War Germany was divided into four sectors. Three of these sectors were controlled by the western powers: France, Great Britain, and the United States. The fourth sector in the east was controlled by the Soviet Union. Significantly, it was not only the country itself that was divided, but also the city of Berlin, Nazi Germany's former capital. Each of the four powers controlled a portion of the city with the United States, Britain, and France in the west and the Soviet Union in the eastern part of the city. The newly installed socialist government in the east would come to be controlled by one political party: the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), or the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

Under the watchful eyes of the four controlling powers two new German governments were founded. In the west, composed of the territory under the authority of the United States, France, and Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was founded. This government would take the form of a democratic capitalist government with political and economic values most closely resembling those of the United States. In the east, with the help of the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was founded. The government in the east modeled itself in the Soviet socialist style. This placed Germany, and specifically Berlin with its own internal border between east and west, at the heart of the Cold War. When one looks at a map of divided Germany, one can see that Berlin itself lies deep within East Germany itself. This creates a situation where there is a small island of the west located in the heart of the east. What this

shows is the political and symbolic significance of maintaining control over the former capital of the former German capital. While East Germany maintained their capital in Berlin, the GDR moved their capital to Bonn.

Beyond division of political power in Berlin, much of the city itself was nearly in ruins. The results of 350 bombing raids and fighting in the streets left thousands of tons of rubble to be removed¹, seventy-five percent of the city's building destroyed, and one-third to one-half of the city's housing stock, especially in central neighborhoods, destroyed.² Furthermore, the existing housing in Berlin was substandard. Much of the housing in the city consisted of *Mietskaserne* (also known as rental barracks) similar to tenements. These *Mietskaserne* sprang up in Berlin in the nineteenth century as the city grew as an industrial and increasingly powerful political center.

This type of housing was ultimately a result of the 1861 Hobrecht Plan. James Hobrecht, a young engineer, created a new plan in anticipation of the rapid expansion of the city (Berlin would grow from a population of 932,000 in 1871 to 3.8 million by 1919). His plan laid out the city in large grids divided by wide boulevards. The grids were intended to be divided up by smaller streets, but because of an absence of building regulation, the land was quickly bought up and *Mietskaserne* were constructed with little regard for the intricacies of the plan.³ *Mietskaserne* were multistory apartment buildings centered around a small, dark central courtyard. Typically, wealthier middle

¹ Jennifer V. Evans, "Life Among the Ruins: Sex, Space, and Subculture in Zero Hour Berlin", in *Berlin Divided City, 1945-1989*, (Berghan Books, 2011), 11.

² Pugh, Emily. *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin*, 31.

³ Ibid. 20.

class people moved into the front of the buildings on the lower floors. These were more accessible and received the most light and fresh air. As one moved further back into the courtyards of the buildings, the apartments would get smaller, darker, and more crowded. The housing was incredibly crowded and more often than not lacked heat and often running water.⁴ *Mietskaserne* weren't typically great places to live when they were first built, and as time and war caused the deterioration of this housing, a new solution needed to be found.

Post war housing projects would become attempts to create changing models that addressed the lack of adequate housing within the city, both in the East and the West. At the same time, the GDR wanted to project a vision of modernity and, mostly, a forward looking future for both the city and a socialist Germany. In the Words of Emily Pugh in *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin*, "For many architects the goal in embracing a new style and approach to architecture was to address and ultimately solve the problems of the modern metropolis and its masses of people".⁵ This is the situation, both politically and with relation to Berlin's housing, in which the occupying powers, architects, planners, and Berliners found themselves at the end of the war, and a situation that is strikingly similar for the creation of *Mietskaserne* in the first place. The destruction of the city and new political opportunities provided planners, governments, and architects the ability to rebuild Berlin from the rubble. At the same

⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

time, this new construction expressed a narrative of new German identities and political power breaking and distancing themselves from the recent fascist past.

Although there is a lot to be said about the differences in approaches to housing in both East and West Berlin, this thesis looks specifically at how housing changed throughout the Cold War under the direction of the socialist German Democratic Republic in East Berlin. The story of housing in East Berlin during this period is not simply a narrative of changing architectural styles, but also one of the exercise of power and policy under the direction of the SED to make, remake, and create new built space to project its values, power, and prestige in a larger contested space—that of post war, and later, Cold War Germany. Furthermore, these architectural developments, ones that have some of the most direct impact on the everyday lives of East German citizens, also defined and redefined what the state believed a socialist German identity should look like. In short, the government of East Germany, and specifically the ruling SED, used the architecture of housing to project the power and political values of the state, and, to a degree, to define and redefine a socialist German identity. This not only meant addressing real issues related to housing in post-war East Germany, but also the use of housing as prestige projects in East Berlin to promote the international standing of the German Democratic Republic in a city that would become one of the most prominent symbols of the Cold War.

This study of housing in Cold War East Berlin look at three specific projects: Stalinallee, Marzahn, and Nikolaiviertel. Each represents a change in direction of architectural thought based around three organizing principles, as well as a change to

what it meant to be a citizen of the German Democratic Republic. First, Stalinallee is built around the main thoroughfare that runs through the apartment blocks: this is the main feature around which everything else was organized. Second, Marzahn was organized around the family and their individual apartment. The apartment, and the conglomeration of many apartments, was the medium through which the state would provide the space for families to raise children into a purely socialist world. Finally, Nikolaiviertel, among other areas in central East Berlin, was organized around the *Kiez*, or neighborhood. The *Kiez* is a return to more traditional forms of societal organization and structure. These organizational principles, as will be elaborated in the following chapters, comprise the most basic elements of the arc historical of building and renovation in the GDR.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses Stalin Allee. This was a project built in the early 1950s in the Soviet Socialist Realist style. The chapter covers the construction of the project, its use as a prestige project for the GDR in a pre-wall Berlin, and its redefinition of the East German identity. Essentially, Stalin Allee was built to represent a distinct break from Germany's recent Nazi past. It was a redefinition of German identity from fascist to Socialist following the Soviet model.

Chapter two is about a further pivot by the SED in the GDR. Beginning in the 1960s and then into the 70s there was a distinct shift away from Socialist Realism in housing towards Modernism and prefabricated concrete apartment blocks. Marzahn, a housing settlement on the north-eastern edge of Berlin is the prime, and most famous, example of this. The project, one that would become the largest of its kind in Europe,

moved some of the working class from the center of the city, out of the *Mietskaserne*, and into new, bright, apartments complete with modern amenities. More significantly, while the use of *Plattenbauen*, prefabricated concrete structures, was a way to address an extreme shortage of adequate housing in the GDR, it was also a further redefinition by the SED of the East German identity. Marzahn placed the resident in a completely new housing settlement, one totally planned and constructed by the state. It was a space heavily imbued with meaning by the power and ideology of the state, and in this way it worked to completely redefine the East German identity as one that is totally socialist. The family and the individual apartment played an important role in the planning and goals of Marzahn. Not only were the family and the apartment the basic building block of the project. Ultimately, it was a space intended to be purely socialist in character and form, and in that way it was intended to indoctrinate children into a truly socialist, perhaps utopic, worldview. It is also important to note that at the time this was highly desirable housing. For many residents, it was a huge upgrade from previous housing in the center of the city or out in the country.

The final chapter looks at Nikolaiviertel, a neighborhood near the center of East Berlin, full of reconstructed apartments, shops, and restaurants intended to look like historical buildings that existed in the neighborhood and the surrounding area before the war. This new *Kiez* was constructed to celebrate the 750th anniversary of Berlin's founding. Although they primarily used the modernist *Plattenbauen*, the facades of the buildings were ornamented and stylistically intended to appear as if they were built anywhere from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, well before the

destruction of the Second World War. This is both a move to reclaim the German architectural styles and history to promote the GDR as the true representative of German culture and history, to legitimize a weakening SED, and create a strong image for both East German citizens and the world.

The basic building block here becomes the *Kiez*, or neighborhood. This had a twofold purpose. First, there was still valuable housing stock in the center of the city, and it needed to be renovated or empty plots needed to be built upon in order to address a continued shortage of adequate housing. It proved expensive and difficult to renovate old apartment buildings, but it was relatively efficient and more cost effective than building from scratch at the edge of the city. It also fostered an active street life that other approaches to housing and planning may not have. An embrace of historical forms of housing and styles in central neighborhoods of East Berlin were an important step in getting to what would be Nikolaiviertel. Second, the housing was meant to invoke the idea of *Heimat*. The word *Heimat* can be directly translated as homeland, but also includes ideas of nation, historical identity, and German culture. Nikolaiviertel exemplifies a “neo-historical” style: one that creates strong references to the past, but does not recreate it in the way it originally was. In this way, the SED is once more changing its stylistic approach to architecture, housing, and planning. The historicizing of neighborhood makes a claim on a historical German identity in the socialist state. It places legitimacy of the state in the past, no longer a complete break with historically German culture or identity, but a repurposing of it.

It is important to place Berlin in its proper context during the Cold War. Berlin was a clear symbol of the conflict between the ideologies of East and West. For the SED, this put Berlin in a privileged position as the country's capital, contrary to the agreement of the occupying powers. The Federal Republic of Germany moved its capital to Bonn in the west, out of the now divided country's historic capital. It made the city the showcase for what was possible under socialism, often to the detriment of the rest of the country. East Berlin is not completely representative of the entire German Democratic Republic, however, it is nonetheless an interesting and useful case study in East German housing, and all the it represented, between the end of World War II and the collapse of the GDR and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Chapter 1: Stalinallee— The Monumental Thoroughfare

Walter Ulbricht, the leader of the SED and the GDR from 1950 to 1971, proclaimed the importance of Stalinallee as a symbolic tool, that “represents the ground stone of the building of socialism in the capital of Germany, Berlin”.⁶ It was one of the first attempts after the end of the Second World War by the SED to establish its own promise and power, as well as a new East German Identity through housing and architecture. Planning for the project began in 1951, a mere 6 years after the end of the WWII and ten years before the construction of the Berlin Wall, and it played a significant role as a prestige project for the GDR. Stalinallee was intended as show of strength, building prowess, and socialist identity in a city with a porous border that divided the areas of the city controlled by capitalist democracies and a totalitarian socialist regime. The main organizing principle of this endeavor was the thoroughfare, Stalinallee (later renamed Karl-Marx-Allee), from which the project as a whole got its name. The project aimed to prove the superiority of the socialist political system not only to Germans, but also to the rest of the world through grandiose scale and multiuse housing known as “palaces for the workers”⁷. In this way, Berlin would become a microcosm of the greater conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union even before the city was completely divided a decade later. This chapter aims to show that Stalinallee was an important step in defining the look of East German housing and architecture and a

⁶ Deborah, Howell-Ardila, “Berlin’s Search for a ‘Democratic’ Architecture: Post-World War II and Post-unification”. *German Politics & Society*, Vol 16, No. 3 (Fall 1998), 72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

distinctly socialist identity in the early years of the GDR as a project that was imbued with symbolic meaning in a new Germany.

The design for Stalinallee began as competition in 1951 as part of the GDR's first Five Year Plan (1950-1955), and construction began in 1952. Housing would be one piece of a larger vision with the thoroughfare itself, "Germany's first socialist street"⁸, at its center. The competition was won by Hermann Henselmann, and he would take responsibility for the overall design and layout of the project with five other architects working beneath him.⁹ Although he was originally a modernist architect, a style that was originally rejected by the SED and the soviets as "formalist" and something that had become too closely associated with the west and capitalism, Henselmann was a committed socialist and moved to East Berlin after the war. In order to accommodate the needs of this new project and the architectural and planning doctrine of the party, he adopted the tenants of Socialist Realism for his work at Stalinallee.

Although Henselmann was initially a modernist, he was inspired by nineteenth-century neoclassical architect, Karl Friedrich Schinkel. This was well in line with the desires of the SED. An early rhetorical strategy of Ulbricht was to place the legitimacy of the GDR both in German communists political opposition to the Nazi party. This would leave German socialists mostly blameless for the atrocities committed by Hitler and the Nazi party. This opposition was also expressed in historicized German architecture.¹⁰

⁸ Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics and Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2014), 34.

⁹ Giudici, Maria Shéhérazade Guidici, "The Last Great Street of Europe: The Rise and Fall of Stalinallee". *Architectural Association School of Architecture, AA Files*, No. 65 (2012), 125.

¹⁰ Pugh, 35.

Pugh quotes the Central Committee of the SED's 1951 reconstruction proposal, "The new Berlin will grow out of the old Berlin...We want a national, German style of architecture, one that is derived from the great masters of German building history".¹¹ This same thought process, legitimacy through calls to historicism by the SED, is also affirmed by Howell-Ardila.¹² It is clear that Henselmann's work on Stalinallee falls in line with the desires of the party.



Figure 1: Photo of Stalinallee. Bundesarchiv, DH 2/21836, 3 von 4.

¹¹ Ibid, 38.

¹² Howell-Ardila, 65.

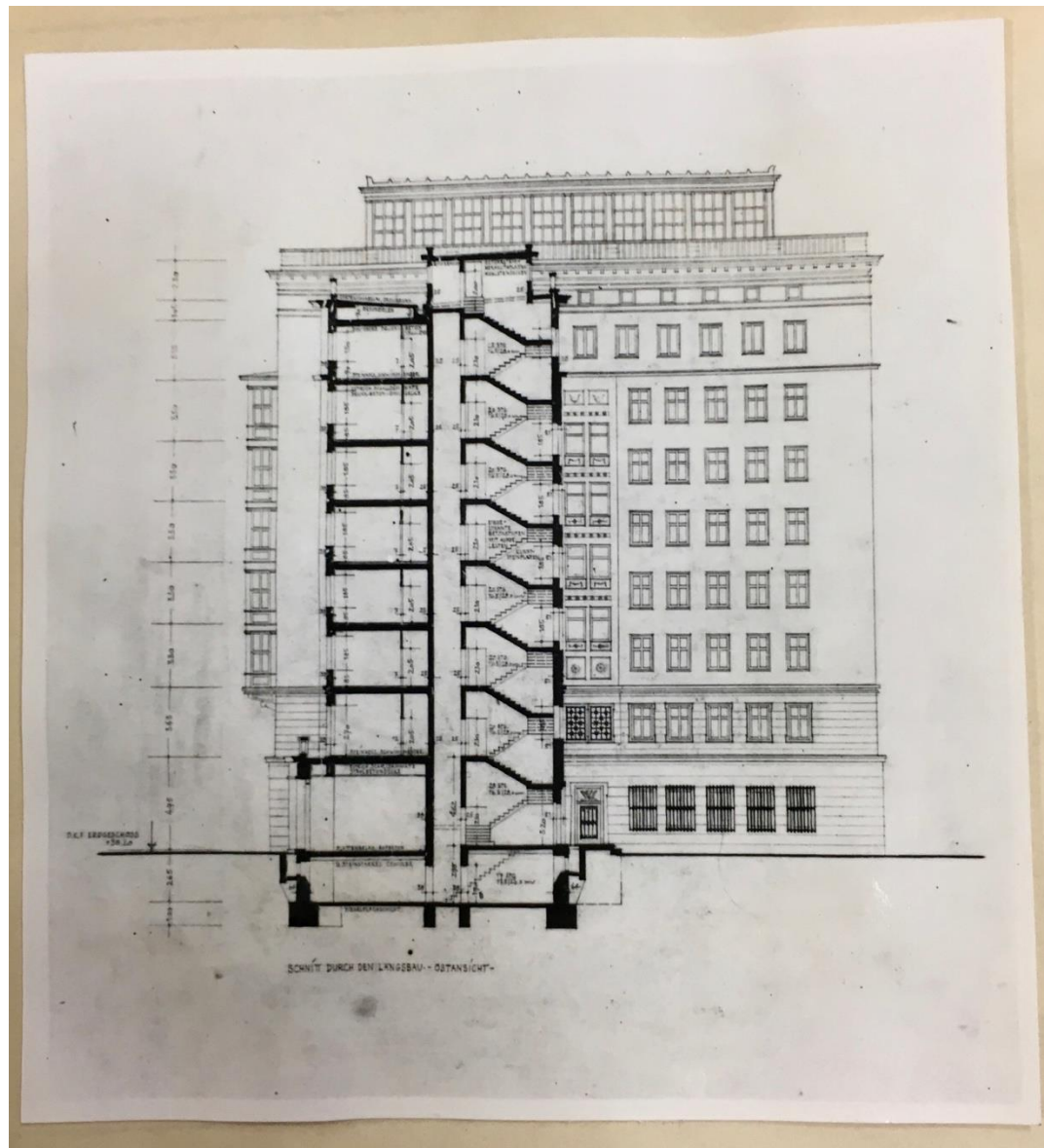


Figure 2: Stairwell Plan and Profile of Apartment Building at Stalinalle. Bundesarchiv DH 2/21836, 3 von 4.

In 1950, The SED created the Sixteen Principles of Urban Planning based upon the Soviet model of the time. While all the rules are significant, it is sufficient to say that they were in opposition to those espoused by Modernist architects and planners. For the purposes of this work, principles twelve and fourteen are the most important. Rule 12 states, "It is impossible to create a city in a garden. Naturally, sufficient greening must be provided. But, the rule is not to be upset: In the city one lives more urban, on

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the edge of the city or outside the city one lives more rural.”¹³ Rule 12 is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it sets up a precept for how the city should look: It should be green, but it should still maintain the character of the city. Second, this is in almost direct opposition to ideas central to modernist planning and housing construction in the early and mid-twentieth century. Many modernist planners and thinkers, like Le Corbusier, thought it was better to build with an abundance of open green space around large towers, as opposed to the cramped and dark conditions found in and around *Mietskaserne*.

Rule 12 was also likely a response to a plan for Berlin proposed by Hans Scharoun in 1946. Scharoun was a modernist architect and planner, specifically well known today for the iconic Berlin Philharmonic concert hall he designed in West Berlin. Scharoun’s plan was one for the entirety of the city. At the time, there was not a solid divide between east and west, and many Berliners assumed the city would be returned to them undivided. Under his plan, the city was to be divided into three rings: the middle band would contain official, entertainment, and commercial function, and the outer two bands would primarily consist of housing. The housing, mostly to consist of tall modernist towers surrounded by greenery, would be connected to the other rings by an efficient road network.¹⁴ It would be a total break with the old urban fabric of Berlin.

¹³ “Die 16 Grundsätze des Städtebaus”. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/wiederaufbau-der-staedte/64346/die-16-grundsaeetze-des-staedtebaus>. Translated by Max Frank.

¹⁴ Peter Blundell Jones. *Hans Scharoun: A Monograph*, (London: Gordon Fraser, 1978), 94.

Rule 14 reads, "City planning is the basis of architectural design. The central question of city planning and of architectural design of the city is the creation of an individual, unique face of the city. The architecture employs, at the same time, the progressive traditions of the past embodied in the experience of the people."¹⁵ Principle fourteen is significant because it specifically calls for the use of a historicized style. The historicized style. This historicized style was heavily rooted in the skilled work of builders and workers. These laborers offer the experience of organized labor and the origins of the communist and socialism in Germany and the rest of the world. This is also an effort by the SED to capture and create a new sense of German identity by using the common imagery *Heimat* in East Berlin and in the GDR: historic styles and images that provide continuity and legitimacy for the SED rooted in German architectural style. Simultaneously, the language rooted in socialist imagery attempts to make a distinct break with the capitalist west and the fascist past.

Stalinallee itself is a 90 meter wide boulevard that stretches 2.3 kilometers it "was to be lined with blocks of seven to nine story (buildings) and bookended with two squares, to stress the unitary character of the intervention".¹⁶ The apartment blocks on each side are grand in scale. Greg Castillo gives a brief but apt description of the neoclassical style the architects chose when they designed the project, "It's kilometer long run of neoclassical facades, ennobled by travertine sheathing and Doric columns, consciously recalled the architecture of imperial Prussia. Lustrous ceramic tiles made by

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Giudici, 125.

the Meissen porcelain works sheathed the upper stories of the boulevard's apartment blocks".¹⁷ Stalinallee was modeled after Moscow's Gorki Street and the buildings themselves were constructed in a Neoclassical style. The project was design to be mixed use with shops, restaurants, entertainment existing on the first floors of the buildings while the upper stories were housing.¹⁸

The housing itself was intended to be well appointed and somewhat embellished *Wohnpaläste*, or dwelling places, for the working class. This extended to the interiors of the buildings as well. The furniture inside was intended to be based on earlier styles like Biedermeier and Chippendale, and according to Pugh, these aesthetic choices were intended as "proof of the GDR's commitment not only to native culture and domestic comfort of the working class, but also to handicraft approaches that honored labor, as opposed to an industrialized aesthetic that symbolized the worker's subjugation to the machine".¹⁹ To put this more succinctly, the project was intended to be "socialist in content and national in form".²⁰ These stylistic choices were intended to take styles and spaces originally intended for the bourgeois and ruling classes and turn them into spaces for the working classes.

¹⁷ Greg Castillo, "The Nylon Curtain, Architectural Unification in Divided Berlin", in *Berlin: Divided City, 1945-1989*, ed. Philip Broadbent and Sabine Hake (Berghahn Books, 2010), 47.

¹⁸ Howell-Ardila, 66-67.

¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

²⁰ Castillo, 47.

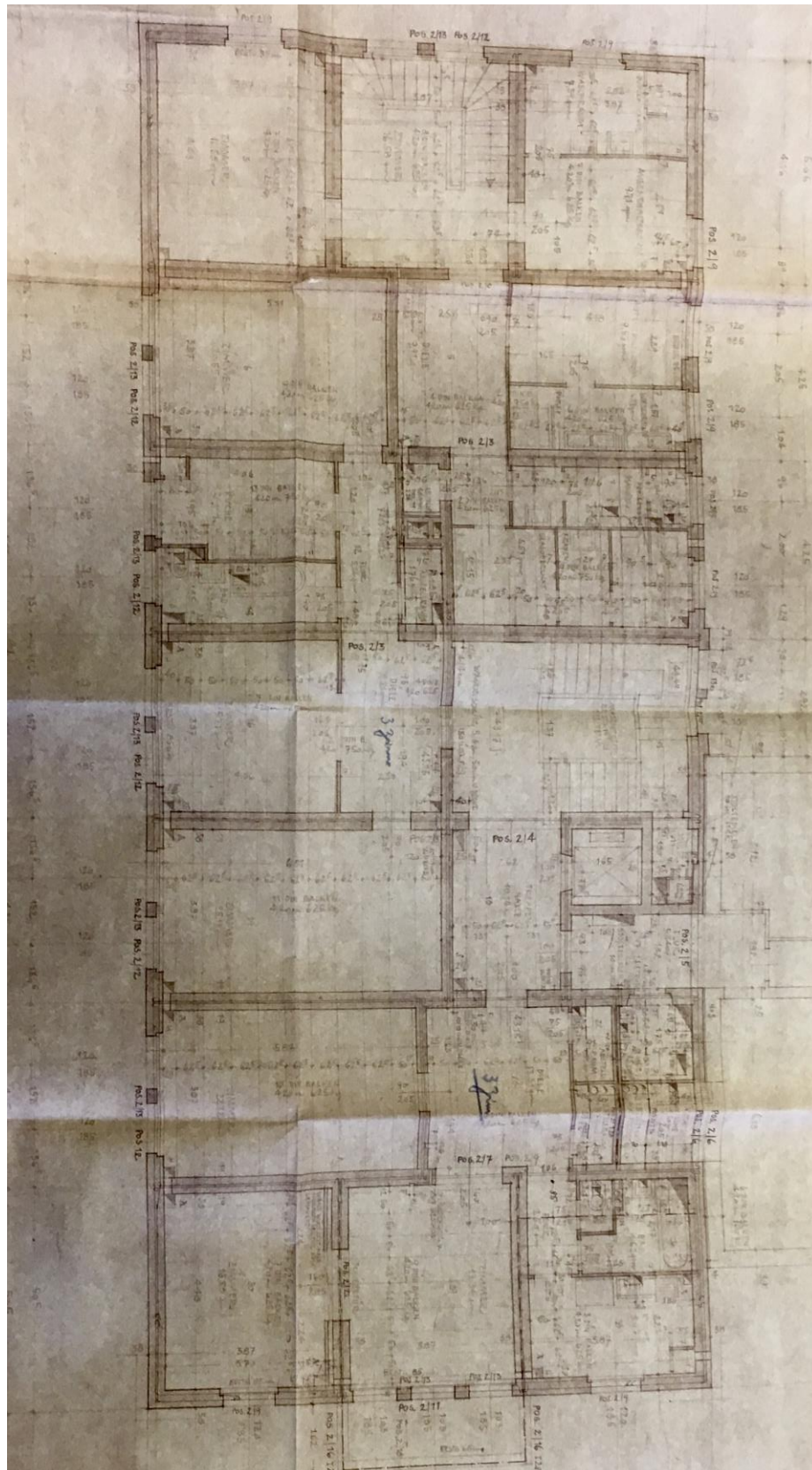


Figure 3: Stalinallee Floor Plan. Bundesarchiv, DH 2/ 21836.

The symbolism of the project and its propaganda value are critical to what the project was for the SED and the GDR. As an example, the state commissioned a poem by Kurt Barthel to celebrate the project:

On this street, peace came to the city. / The city was dust, / we were dust and shards, / and dead tired. / But tell me, how should one dies? / Stalin himself took us up by the hand / and bid us. / Hold our head high- / and as we cleared rubble and make plans, / Planted the greensward, build the housing blocks, / there we were victors, / and the city began to live. / Straight to Stalin led the path, along which the friends came. / Never will these windows, / these new glinting panes, / shimmer with flame! Tell me, / How should one thank Stalin? / We gave this street his name. (Barthel 1953)²¹

Stalinallee was a project that clearly stated the propagandistic intentions, and allegiance of the GDR to the Soviet Union, of the SED. Furthermore, Castillo calls Stalinallee “East Germany’s ultimate marketing tool: a model of the socialist future built at a one-to-one scale”.²² Stalinallee was the promise of a socialist future supported by the power of the German worker and the might of the Soviet Union: the shops on the ground floor of the apartment blocks would be well stocked, entertainment was easily within reach, and apartments for workers would be comfortable and identifiably socialist in nature. Even the construction itself had political and propaganda value: it was tied symbolically to the building of the GDR, and especially the East German capital, post war. The creation and construction of Stalinallee was part of the SED’s *Aufbau des Socialismus* (buildup of socialism), a cultural production and economic program.²³ Pugh writes,

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Pugh, 40.

The focus of the SED Aufbau program propaganda was on the collective labor required to build the new, socialist, and singular German nation. While paintings, poems and songs valorized the Stalinallee and its construction workers, the SED's newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, was filled photographs that emphasized the wide variety of East Germans who were contributing to the effort. Images showed men, woman (sic), and even young children and celebrities chipping in at the building site, with engineers and architects working alongside less skilled workers.²⁴

The images and ideas shown in this propaganda clearly show Stalinallee as a place for all citizens of the GDR, and everyone would work together to rebuild Germany regardless of occupation, gender, education, or age. Stalinallee would be a comfortable, socialist space in which everyone worked and everyone lived happily.

All was not perfect, however. One of the ironies of Stalinallee, however, is that its construction along a single major axis, the organizing principle and basic building block of the project, was highly reminiscent of Albert Speer's design for Berlin during the Nazi period. The contentious relationship between fascist urban planning and the new socialist planned project is summed up nicely by Maria Shéhérazade Giudici:

...(t)he East Berlin Authorities decided to build a new *via triumphalis* as a tangible expression of their new order. The construction of this kind of grandiose backdrop for mass gatherings fitted the canon of Stalinist architecture, but it was also problematic when seen in the context of Berlin, suggesting an unsavory continuity with the formal language of the Third Reich and in particular the north-south axis Albert Speer had designed, but never realized for the Nazis. The ambition that Staninallee inherited from Speer would be to offer an alternative to Unter den Linden, the boulevard that represented the traditional core of Prussian Berlin. Whereas Unter den Linden was lined mainly with public and administrative building the DDR's new street was to be residential, stressing the centrality of the worker in the socialist city.²⁵

Stalinallee was an attempt to take something old and make it new and different in a distinctly socialist way. However, because it was built along this large *via triumphalis*,

²⁴ Ibid, 41.

²⁵ Giudici, 125.

plenty wide enough for military parades, it also lends itself to a militaristic and totalitarian interpretation. This is not an accident. The *via triumphalis* is the main organizing feature of Stalinallee. The space of the street is the main organizing principle around which the buildings were constructed. It was intentionally constructed this way to show the power of the SED and the worker. The street itself would be used for the May Day parades and celebrations.

Further ironies manifest themselves in the later stages of the project. First, is the East German uprising of 1953 in which the workers at the Stalinallee site were prominent players, second is that few workers ended up living in the apartments there, and the third is the reception and use of the space after its completion. The East German uprising of June 17, 1953 began as a response by workers to new work “norms”, or “state demands for increased time and output on the job” that became a dispute over labor conditions.²⁶ Stalinallee was relatively central to this uprising. Three hundred workers from the site marched on the House of Ministers in Berlin in protest of the new work norms as well as a shortages of food and other basic commodities. The protests against the SED and for improved living conditions, ones that the workers were building, in Berlin and DDR were violently put down by Soviet troops and tanks.²⁷ The Barthel poem seems to take on a different, more sinister meaning when thought about in the context of the uprising. The new dream of a socialist Germany was not off to a good start. The irony is that those building the “worker’s palaces” did not see the fruits

²⁶ Christian F. Ostermann, preface to *Uprising in East Germany, 1953: The Cold War, The German Question, and The First Major Upheaval Behind the Iron Curtain*, (Central European University Press, 2001), xv.

²⁷ Pugh, 45-46.

of their labor. They worked for a grandiose project that was made more for prestige and propaganda than the workers themselves.

It was not often the workers themselves that wound up living in the new apartments at Stalinallee. The apartments were mostly full of “model residents”: “party functionaries, ministry employees, worker-activists, award winning inventors’ and other elites of East German society.”²⁸ The workers who built Stalinallee were likely never to live in the apartments themselves. In reality, it looked less like “palaces for the workers”, but a reshuffling of the elite of German society in the name of socialism. Although the project put a new face on East German identity and gave new aesthetic form to socialism, many workers were still stuck in the *Mietskaserne*.

The border between East and West Berlin was still permeable, and Stalinallee received criticism of the project from the West. *Der Tag*, a newspaper in West Berlin, cited “sloppy construction”, “illogical room layout”, and called the project “the world’s greatest rental barracks! [*Mietskaserne*]”.²⁹ Critics in the west associated the German neoclassical architecture of Stalinallee with Nazism because of the Nazi’s use of the historical style and monumentalize. They saw it as “the built expression of an oppressive, dictatorial government”.³⁰ Although Stalinallee was not universally loved in the east, the latter critiques of Stalinallee do hold some weight. While the SED considered themselves antifascist, their choice of architectural style does have a certain

²⁸ Castillo, 48.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Pugh, 45.

aesthetic that lends itself elements of design utilized by the Nazis and other totalitarian regimes.

It is important to also point out the practical and political successes of Stalinallee. Some East German citizens were able to move into their own large, well-furnished apartments with modern amenities like telephones, central heat, private bathrooms. These things were signs of a modern society, and a society in which the government looked after the needs and wants of the people. The SED, for better or for worse, used Stalinallee to establish a strong link between housing construction, the worker, the rebuilding of Germany, the promise of socialism—and its values and ideals—with the state and the party itself.³¹ If the state could provide what was needed and what was desired by citizens of the GDR, it could lead to long term success and the commitment of the people to the SED's plans and policies. Stalinallee was an important moment in the definition of architectural style and identity in East Germany. It placed Berlin at the center of the SED's efforts to define German identity through architecture. It showed that the state would play a strong role in defining what German identity looked like and how it should be defined by inscribing meaning into the built environment and everyday spaces.³² I would argue that this is not just true of Stalinallee, but also of projects like Marzahn, which will be discussed in the next chapter. While these two housing projects were quite different in both form and in the function of everyday life, both produced, through the power of the party and the state,

³¹ Ibid., 42.

³² Ibid., 47.

a distinct idea about what East German identity meant in the context of the socialist state.

Chapter 2 – Marzahn: A New Housing Program, Modernism, and The Family

A shift in thought around housing took place in the German Democratic Republic primarily beginning in the 1970s. The change in GDR housing moved towards the development of prefabricated housing that was meant to address the need for a greater quantity of housing, as well as housing that met contemporary standards and included amenities like modern kitchens, heat, sufficient natural light, and bathrooms in each apartment. In order to help achieve these goals, the SED created a new Housing Construction Program. A large piece of this program would become the housing project known as Marzahn. This project moved workers, young families, and some party elite to the north-east edge of Berlin. Marzahn epitomized a change in the way in which built space, and specifically housing, were thought about in the GDR. This meant a shift away from the main thoroughfare as the center for building, as was the case with Stalin Allee, towards the individual apartment and the family as the central unit through which projects were organized and constructed.

The story of Marzahn begins with the ascension of Erich Honecker as Ulbricht's replacement as the General Secretary of the SED in 1971. By this time, Ulbricht's popularity had begun to wane, and that helped prompt Honecker's rise to power. Under Ulbricht's leadership, there was a promise of construction of 750,000 new apartments in East Germany by the end of the 1960s. However, it became increasingly evident that he put little priority on solving the GDR's housing problems, and by the end of the decade most East Germans were still living in similar conditions to those found in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³³ During Ulbricht's tenure as leader of the party, housing construction peaked in 1961 with 92,009 units constructed, and was at its lowest in 1966 with 68,162 units constructed.³⁴ Furthermore, Ulbricht had been more concerned with the establishment of a socialist state and the growth of East Germany's industry, rather than the meeting the needs of East German citizens in terms of consumption or access to adequate housing.³⁵

Honecker, upon his rise to leadership of the party, swiftly introduced a new housing program in the GDR. Honecker wanted to use housing to implement certain socialist ideals—to bring together the social and economic goals of socialism. A large part of this would become Honecker's Housing Construction Program, or *Wohnungsbauprogramm*. The new housing program's goal was to provide each East German citizen with a new or renovated apartment by 1990.³⁶ Although this goal was not met by the time the Berlin Wall fell, in the first ten years of Honecker's rule, housing construction in the GDR generally increased every year. There were 86,777 apartments built in the GDR in 1971, and, by 1981, that number had increased to 185,350 for the year.³⁷ In fact, the housing program would be the largest investment of capital in the history of the GDR.³⁸ This is in stark contrast to the situation in the GDR in the 1950s: in

³³ Eli Rubin, "From 'Mietskaserne' to Wohnungsbauserie" 70 in East Berlin's Northeast," *Central European History*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (June 2014): 347-8.

³⁴ Bundesarchiv, "Statistisches Jahrbuch des Bauwesens, 1976", DE 2 31451, 67.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 450.

³⁶ Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

³⁷ Bundesarchiv, "Statistisches Jahrbuch des Bauwesens, 1982", DE 2 30013, 45.

³⁸ Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics and Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2014), 289.

1950, only one third of one percent of the GDR's budget was spent on housing. This number would drop to one tenth of one percent by 1955, around the time Stalin Allee was constructed.³⁹ Marzahn became a very visible piece of the Housing Construction Program, and, in addition to being the largest housing settlement of its kind constructed in Europe during the Cold War, it would become a symbol for the utopian ideals of the socialist state, the SED, and their ideology represented through housing and urban planning.

As stated by Emily Pugh in *Architecture, Politics and Identity in Divided Berlin*, the SED actively worked to link the projects of the Housing Construction Program to the party and Honecker himself.⁴⁰ The success of the state and the party became deeply intertwined with the success of the costly, although badly needed, housing program. In many respects the program itself did succeed: in 1972 more than one hundred thousand new apartments were constructed, and between 1972 and 1973 the quota for housing construction was exceeded for the first time. In fact, in 1975, the number of dwelling per capita in the GDR was for the first time higher than in the Federal Republic.⁴¹ This is important because housing was a significant way for the SED to project their power and vision both domestically and abroad.

However, that does not mean that Honecker's housing program was a complete success. While it did succeed in creating a mass of new housing, it was still not enough

³⁹ Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 20.

⁴⁰ Pugh, 298.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

to meet the demand of people in search of new, or at least renovated apartments. Pugh writes, "In 1981, eight years into the Housing Construction Program, 40 percent of the GDR dwellings still did not have a dedicated bathroom and 36 percent were not supplied with hot water. By 1990, 29.2 percent of multiple-family dwellings and 53 percent of one- and two-family dwellings dated to before 1918".⁴² By the time the wall fell, 800,000 requests for housing were waiting to be filled.⁴³

Despite the shortcomings of the Housing Construction Program, Marzahn became an example for what was possible under a socialist state with the funds and the power to remake housing. The plan for Marzahn, which originally called for the construction of 20,000 apartments, was put into place in March and April of 1973, and the plans were later expanded to call for the construction 35,000 apartments in 1974.⁴⁴ The project was intended to house upwards of 100 thousand residents.⁴⁵ Marzahn was a truly huge project built on the edge of Berlin where, at the time, was much less populated than the inner city neighborhoods. Some work had to be done before construction could get underway. 575 dwelling, mostly small houses had to be demolished, and 475 of the 931 families that lived in the area that would become Marzahn had to move. The families that lived there were offered housing in the settlement once it was completed.⁴⁶ Underneath the ground, there were also remnants

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 300.

⁴⁴ Rubin, 33.

⁴⁵ Pugh, 294.

⁴⁶ Rubin, 54.

of unexploded ordinance, as well as some pre-Germanic archeological sites.⁴⁷ Part of the land on which Marzahn would sit had also been used for sewage in the preceding century.⁴⁸ Although the area had not been quite as empty as planners may have imagined, the minimal density at the edge of the city gave planners and builders the opportunity to more or less start from scratch—to construct a true socialist utopia on a blank slate. The significance of the blank slate cannot be understated. Planners, builders, and politicians were able to take an empty space and imbue it with a new meaning and a new intent to shape the lives of workers and families in the GDR. Through the redefinition of space and place as one deeply embedded with the power of the state and the party and, ideally, with socialist identity disconnected from the history of capitalist, fascist architectural styles, the SED started fresh and, at least in theory, created a space that was both functional and practical and imbued with an East German socialist identity.

The style in which Marzahn was constructed is highly significant because it represents a big shift in housing style and policy, especially in relation to Stalinallee. Although architects in the GDR had been experimenting and building with prefabricated concrete panels in the preceding decade, the basic building block for the apartment buildings in Marzahn represented a true commitment to modernism and modernist housing settlements constructed with prefabricated concrete slabs. The main type of building at Marzahn was the Apartment Construction system 70 (*Wohnungsbau system*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 109.

70 or WBS 70). At the time, this was the most advanced generation of prefabricated housing in the GDR.⁴⁹

The reason for the adoption of prefabricated housing in the GDR, a style once considered “formalist” and not adequate for east Germany—although it was originally pioneered by German architects in the Weimar Republic at the Bauhaus school in the 1920s—is that this kind of construction was quicker and easier to build. The WBS 70 required less labor per unit, and “(t)he series’ aesthetic advantage was that the buildings could be arranged in configurations of greater scale and variety as compared with previous systems. It was thus hoped that the ‘open and dynamic’ WBS 70 would correct the problems of earlier prefabrication systems by increasing dwellings units’ size as well as the buildings’ degree of differentiation both inside and out”.⁵⁰ The units and the buildings themselves were intended to be variable in design inside and outside. The WBS 70 system was used at Marzahn to create buildings of varying heights and interior layouts. Because the apartments were modular, and so was the furniture within them, they could be designed to suit an individual or a family’s needs. Since families, which were critical for the SED’s ideological goals for Marzahn, as will be discussed later in the chapter, this flexibility was important.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁰ Pugh, 294.

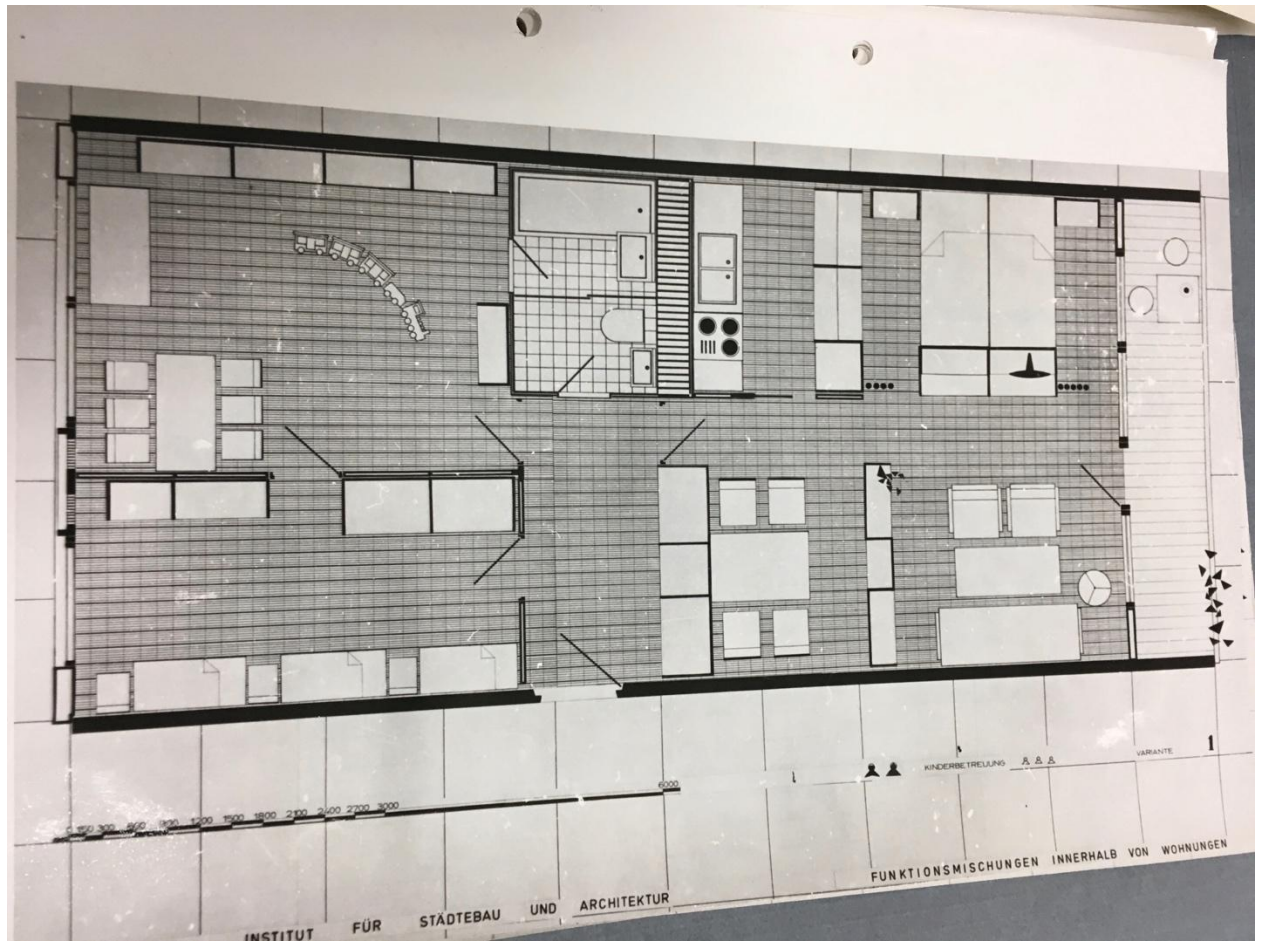


Figure 4: Sample Designs WBS 70: Variant 1 - Young Married Couple With a Child. Bundesarchiv, DH1/22396, 3 von 4.

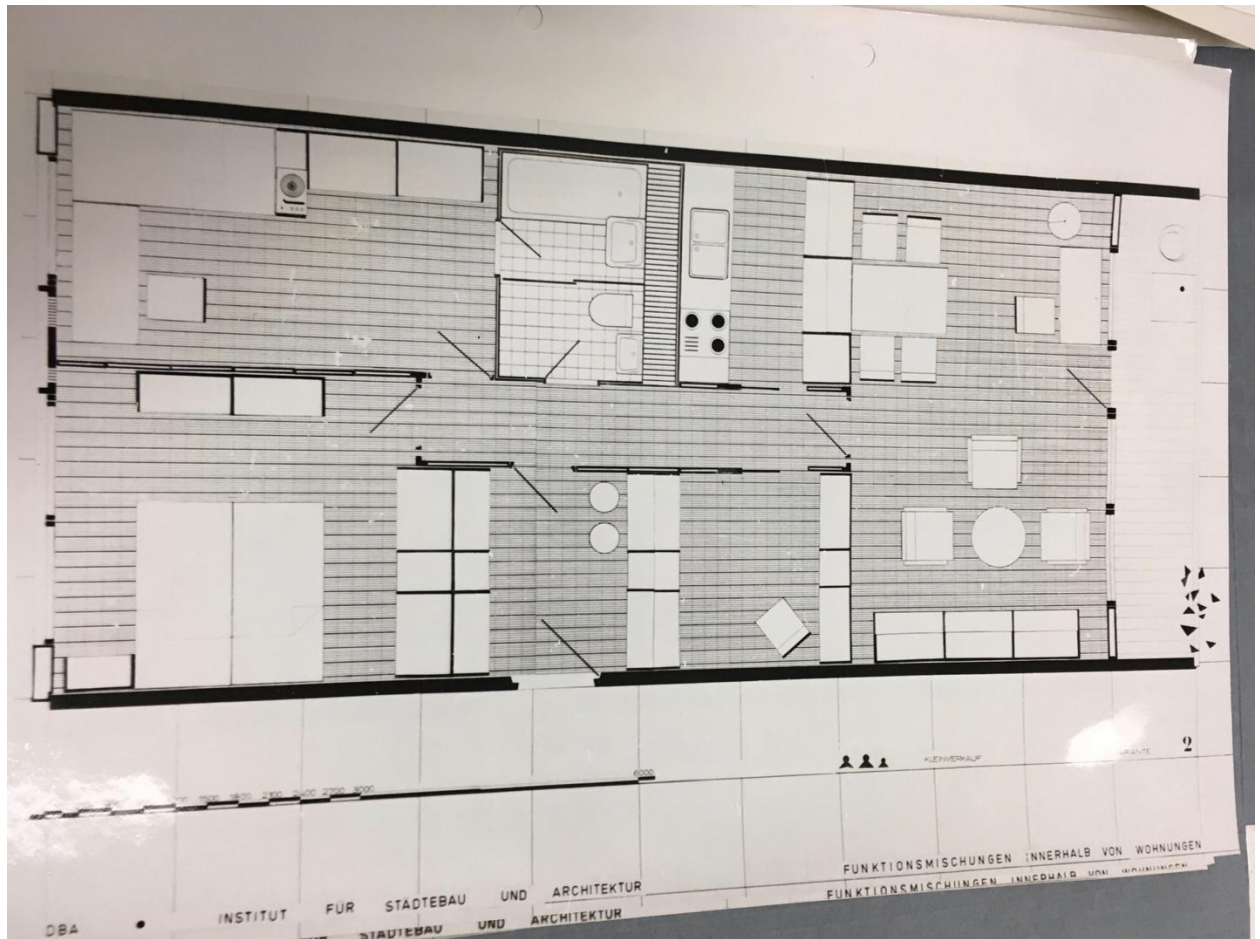


Figure 5: Sample Design WBS 70: Variant 2 – An Apartment for Three People. Bundesarchiv, DH1/22396, 3 von 4.

The apartments in WBS 70 buildings were larger than those of previous generations and they were designed to accommodate large families if need be. The apartments themselves stretched across the width of the building in order to get as much sunlight as possible. This was in order to be in compliance with newly passed laws that required all dwellings to receive a minimum of two hours a day—something that many modernists like Le Corbusier found to be beneficial and integral to apartment

life.⁵¹ Furthermore, This is in direct contrast to the dark and often windowless apartments found in many *Mietskaserne*. In a very real way, simply moving people into these vertical spaces, as opposed to the dark, low-rise courtyards of *Mietskaserne*, was a distinct break with past experiences of lived space.

The design of Marzahn drew heavily upon the modernist ideas of Le Corbusier, a Swiss-French architect, and the architects of CIAM (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*), a very influential group of modernist planners and architects from the early to mid-twentieth century. This theory on planning and housing is summed up relatively succinctly by Eli Rubin:

(East German planners) were influenced by Le Corbusier's radical "City of Tomorrow" ...which sought to remake the modern city along purely rational, functionalist terms. In his plan, citizens of the City of Tomorrow would dwell in high-rise towers, surrounded by open, verdant spaces, to maximize citizens' exposure to sunlight and nature. Traffic would be kept far away from dwellings, and every other part of life, from school to shopping to clinics, would be built within walkable distance from the towers. To work at all, it had to be an entirely new city built from scratch. This was more than just a practical solution to urban planning problems. It was nothing less than geomancy—the belief that the spatial and built environments, from the angle of the sunlight to the distance between buildings to the quality of the air, could fundamentally influence those who dwelt within the space.⁵²

The settlement was divided into three districts: one north, one south, and one central area. The proposal for Marzahn stated that each district would have certain amenities that included schools, cultural centers, athletic centers and medical facilities, among other things like music schools and youth hostels. The southern and northern districts

⁵¹ Rubin, 34.

⁵² Eli Rubin, "From 'Mietskaserne' to Wohnungsbauserie" 70 in East Berlin's Northeast," 344.

would include their own small leisure and business districts, while the center would contain the main district for shops, cafes, and other services.⁵³ Everything should be accessible and within reach for the residents of Marzahn.

The built space of Marzahn was critical to what it would become and the ideology which it would furthermore embody. The blank slate on which Marzahn was built allowed the SED and its planners to put socialist, or party, ideology into practice and redefine what it meant to be German in the GRD. This functioned to create a new identity that was distinct from that of previous eras. People were to live in a place that functioned efficiently and detracted little from a life surrounded by state sponsored structures and infrastructure: recreation, schools, kindergartens, entertainment, some shopping, the home, and oftentimes work were all provided in a relatively compact area. When one worked outside of Marzahn, a rail line into the inner part of the city was readily available. All amenities were designed to be within 600 meters of each apartment building.⁵⁴ Because everything was constructed to be easily accessible, and all amenities and services were nearby, children would not have to leave Marzahn for much, and in this way the space itself and the activities and education sponsored by the state within the settlement provided the SED great power through which to shape and form the ideologies and identities of those that lived and grew in Marzahn. Planners from the SED expressed why they thought modernist housing projects like Marzahn, a planned community, were so important at the twelfth session of the SED in 1969:

⁵³ Pugh, 295.

⁵⁴ Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 41.

The rise in labor productivity and the universal development of the socialist personality is, in the end, reliant upon the quality of dwellings. On the way to developing a socialist lifestyle, a new qualitative demand is placed on housing. In addition to the constant expansion of the housing fund is also the development of new forms of housing. Neither today's nor the future's demands for education and relaxation, relief of the care of children can be provided with the individual apartment. It is complex planning for the neighborhood and the entire city that is necessary in order to solve these problems in the interest of society and every family.⁵⁵

By creating a place that has quality dwellings and "complex planning" that addresses the needs of families, Marzahn would be the model socialist Utopia. The family and the apartment were the main components, but it took the community and the infrastructure of the socialist community in order to achieve the goals of the state to have people educated and live a socialist lifestyle. The construction of the "socialist personality" was a critical step in the construction of socialist identity in the GDR, and it developed between the 1950s and later 1970s. The SED described the goal of developing the socialist personality as "a new kind of human being endowed with the impeccable traits of character on whose ardent socialist convictions rest the fate and future of socialist society".⁵⁶ Bock argues that a child's environment is critical to the formation of their personality: school, friends, politics, cultural surroundings, etc. The SED was heavily invested in the processes of forming the socialist personality through education and environment in the hopes that children would adopt the values of the state.⁵⁷ What the socialist personality meant specifically changed over time, and it also

⁵⁵ Bundesarchiv, DH1/22396, translated by Max Frank.

⁵⁶ Angela Brock, "Producing the 'Socialist Personality'? Socialisation, Education, and the Emergence of New Patterns of Behavior," in *Power and Society in The GDR: 1961-1979*, edited by Mary Fulbrook, (Berghahn Books, 2009), 220.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 220-221.

changed with the switch in leadership from Ulbricht to Honecker. This shift changed from one of community and social order to “the ‘socialist way of life’ (*sozialistische Lebensweise*) led by ‘socialist personalities’, whose main attribute was now regarded to be ‘socialist awareness or ‘socialist consciousness’”.⁵⁸ In short, it was a shift away from the establishment of socialism in society to a true development of socialist ideology among the people. It wouldn’t only be education that promoted the socialist personality, but the built environment as well, and it is possible that Marzahn was the ideal place for this.

In many ways, Marzahn exemplified what the socialist state could do to provide new housing relatively quickly to hundreds of thousands of people. The settlement could be seen, both from the standpoints of numbers and scale as well as a way to produce ideology and identity through built space, as the greatest example of the power of the GDR and the SED to influence the lives of the average citizen. It was a place that was a product of a great deal of capital investment and investment of state power that made a strong attempt to produce a German identity that was distinctly socialist, distinctly German, and, on the surface, altogether disconnected from the past. Although the design for Marzahn was not one strictly utilized by socialist builders and governments, the meaning inscribed to it through the overarching focus on the state in everyday activities outside of the home, it inscribed East German identity on its residents, especially the young.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 224.

The demographics of Marzahn are also equally important because of their unequal distribution.

Table 1: Demographics of Marzahn and East Berlin by Age Group⁵⁹

Age Group	0-7	7-16	16-18	18-25	25-35	35-45	45-55	55-65	65+
Marzahn (% of pop.)	17.2	13.2	1.7	12.3	27	16	6	2.5	4.1
East Berlin (% of pop.)	8.3	13.5	3.3	9.8	13.7	17.8	10.8	7.4	15.4

These numbers are significant because they show that Marzahn was a relatively young place. If one lived there, they were most likely to be a young married couple or a child. In fact, one prerequisite for moving to Marzahn was having a child or children because of the intertwined goals of “real existing socialism” and The Housing Construction Project.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Most of these age groups are not proportional to their total numbers in the city’s population overall. Since most of the people living in the housing settlement were young families, it is not a stretch to make the connection between the demographics of Marzahn and the goals of the state in promoting “real existing socialism”. The generation of children who grew up in Marzahn were the first to have no connection to life before socialism. Although their parents had likely been born in the

⁵⁹ Rubin, 87-88.

⁶⁰ Rubin, 105.

GDR, their parents still had memories of pre-socialist Germany, and they were the first generation that was not part of the build-up to the socialist state. It was all they knew.⁶¹ If one was raised in Marzahn, they were more likely to be influenced by those socialist spaces around them. The choice to have the settlement's population consist of many young families, perhaps, was an attempt by the state to raise a generation of children in this socialist utopia with a fully developed socialist personality and identity. Older people, or people with grown up children, were likely less desirable for raising a new generation of people committed to the state and the ideology of SED. That is why family was so important to the success or failure of Marzahn ideologically.

A first-hand account of a resident of Marzahn is illustrative, although slightly subversive. He grew up in the settlement and saw the built space as a projection of the socialist identity, one that was infused within him within the space in which he grew up:

When I went to school, I could choose between two paths. Both were about equal in length and both paved with asphalt...One led straight along the edge of the new housing settlement. That was the way that almost all the kids used. Every morning there was a kind of procession. To the left of the new housing settlement stood tall and proud, and in front of us lay the school. When I took this path, I felt as if I were developing a socialist personality, which would fit into a huge socialist project...The other way snaked through the small garden colony. There, I could linger [*nachhängen*] in peace and alone with my thoughts. In the summer, plum trees grew over the fences, dogs ran barking through the gardens, and on one corner there was a crazy old man who carved wooden figurines. The figures were colorfully painted, and funny to look at, and then there was a small water mill that still turned round and round. That was really the path of self-discovery.⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 100.

It is important here to note that this quote provides conflicting accounts of how the built space functioned. The first path that most of the students used instilled a socialist identity within the interviewee as a child: he used the spaces defined by the SEDs planners to follow the socialist path laid before him. He would use the path that everyone else used, becoming part of the larger community. The second path allowed him the space to construct his own identity outside of the one prescribed by the state. This is not a condemnation of one versus the other, but rather an example of how Marzahn both worked as a space that instilled socialist values and also provided spaces, intentionally or not, that were distinct from those intended or imbued with meaning by the state and the SED.

Furthermore, most of the people moving to Marzahn in the 1970s and 1980s, according to a 1983 Stasi (The Ministry for State Security) survey, were members of mainstream socialist society. These included party officials and primarily workers—although workers is a very broad term, it was the language of the Stasi itself. According to Rubin: “Of the 127,385 people who had moved to Marzahn by May 1983, 28,838 were employed (the rest were mainly children or retired). Of these, 10,555 were employed in some form industry, 3,345 in construction and 1,282 in forestry or agriculture, the rest worked in traditional crafts or trades, in stores (‘trade’), and in transportation; and close to 10,000 worked in other areas, many likely for the state or party”.⁶³ Everyday GDR citizens were supposed to be the backbone of society, and of

⁶³ Rubin, 88.

Marzahn. Those that had dissenting political views or that were outside of the GDR's mainstream likely wouldn't have gotten an apartment there.

It is clear that Marzahn became an important symbol for both the power of the state and housing in the GDR. The SED clearly used the power of the state and its political values in an attempt to once again redefine what it meant to live in socialist East Germany. Marzahn was both an attempt to create a socialist utopia on the edge of the city and address the needs of the housing shortage in Berlin and the GDR as a whole. The housing settlement became both a prestige project and an important, formative place for many young citizens of the GDR. Furthermore, there was a very real legacy of prefabricated housing in the GDR: by the time the wall fell, 45% of East Germans lived in prefabricated *Plattenbauen* similar to those constructed at Marzahn. Although Marzahn was unprecedented and unsurpassed in its scale, it is an important chapter in the story of housing in the GDR. It represents the heights of what could be achieved with modular housing and enough funding. More importantly, Marzahn is a demonstration of the power of the socialist state and the SED to implement a massive project that tried to express the power and prestige of the state and shape the ideology and identity of mainstream GDR society.

Nikolaiviertel – The Reclamation of the Inner City, Mietskaserne, and Historicized Building

While the construction of Marzahn at the edge of the city was ongoing, there was a simultaneous resurgence of development in more central areas in East Berlin. There are a few reasons for this change. First, although massive settlements at the edges of East German cities housed many thousands of people, there was a continuing shortage of housing in the GDR. In order to meet the goals of Honecker's Housing Construction Program by 1990, and for economic reasons, development and renovation had to take place in areas of the city that had been neglected by the government. Second, there was a reclamation of historic, or historicized, forms of housing and architecture in the GDR, and specifically Berlin, that constructed a new urban fabric out of the old. Third, there was a shift in popular opinion and SED policy that once again embraced German history and architectural forms. Nikolaiviertel is an example of this shift. It was a prestige project built for Berlin's 750th anniversary in 1987, but was preceded by other changes in the embrace of historicized styles and forms in the city. This reclamation of the old and the reconstruction, or renovation, of neighborhoods and individual buildings in a historic style represented a return to the Kiez, or neighborhood, as the organizing principle in the center of Berlin.

The change in perception of historical housing and architecture, as well as the worsening economic and political situation in 1970s and 1980s, in the GDR are important to this shift in style. Before the 1970s, historical buildings, and especially *Mietskaserne*, were seen as symbols of the repression and misery of the working class both by the forces of capitalism and

Nazism, and they were not looked upon favorably by the SED or citizens of the GDR. Although there wasn't the same ideological connection to *Mietskaserne* as symbols of capitalist oppression in the West, the governments on both sides of the wall called for the removal of many of the tenements in the city. Removing the old buildings would provide space for new projects and remove buildings that provided increasingly poor living conditions due to neglect or the inability to renovate them.⁶⁴ Outside of a few small scale projects 1950s and 1960s, including some experimentation with *Plattenbauen* in new buildings, renovation of old housing in central neighborhoods in East Berlin neighborhoods was mostly ignored by city planners and the SED up until the 1970s.

Although this existing housing stock was undesirable, the old *Mietskaserne* were deemed an inevitable necessity until they could be slowly removed and replaced. Therefore, minimal labor and money were put into the upkeep of these buildings. First, because this older housing stock in the city was crumbling and progressively getting less and less livable, it had been, and would continue to be, a cause of the housing shortage in the GDR. In 1971, almost 80 percent of the GDR's housing stock was prewar, and most of that was built before 1914.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the SED had frozen rents at 1936 levels, and this provided little incentive or money for owners and residents to renovate or repair the buildings.⁶⁶ Even if these residents had wanted to repair the buildings themselves as part of a voluntary initiative (the *Mach mit!* –

⁶⁴ Florian Urban, *Neo Historical East Berlin: Architecture and Urban Design in the German Democratic Republic 1970-1990* (Ashgate Publishing Company: Burlington VT, 2009), 12..

⁶⁵ Brian Ladd, "Socialist Planning and the Rediscovery of the Old in The German Democratic Republic", *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 27 No. 5 (July 2001): 586-7.

⁶⁶ Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 209.

Take part!—campaign), there was a shortage of materials to fix the buildings, especially those that had received new appliances and amenities.⁶⁷ Despite new construction, the old housing was in such bad shape that, by 1970, the total supply of apartments and dwellings was increasing more slowly than the rate of new construction.⁶⁸ The bad shape of the economy exacerbated the housing situation as well. Between 1975 and 1980, Honecker had promised nearly thirty percent growth in earnings to fund a huge social program. He would boost production in order to serve “the welfare of the working class and of the entire nation”.⁶⁹ However, this promise of massive growth did not come to fruition, leaving citizens with higher expectations for their economic fortunes without much of a difference in actual quality of life. This led to greater dissatisfaction with the SED. However, the SED did intervene in the housing situation in certain ways in the policy shift towards historicized housing.

There were two basic economic reasons for a shift towards the embrace of existing housing in East Berlin. New building could not keep up with the deterioration of the old. There was a strong economic incentive for the SED to renovate older neighborhood buildings when it was possible in order to address the shortage of housing in a more efficient manner while new construction continued. Second, urban sprawl was becoming a worry to planners for two reasons: it encroached on farmland, and, although market value for land was relatively equal because of a lack of housing market in the socialist state, it was more costly to build the necessary infrastructure edge of the city for settlements like Marzahn than repair or expand

⁶⁷ Mark Allinson, “1977: The GDR’s Most Normal Year?”, in *Power and Society in The GDR: 1961-1979*, edited by Mary Fulbrook, (Berghahn Books, 2009), 262.

⁶⁸ Ladd, 587.

⁶⁹ Allinson, 256.

existing infrastructure in areas where it already existed.⁷⁰ As a result of these factors, increased attention was paid to increasing livable housing stock in the center of Berlin.

The 1970s and 1980s saw an embrace of old neighborhoods for political and social reasons as well. There was a growth in the recognition of the value of an active urban life in city centers. There were many petitions by East Berliners calling for the preservation of older buildings and apartments in an appreciation of the “local Berlin color”.⁷¹ This new influence had an effect on the overall structure of neighborhood areas as well. There was a call for new pedestrian zones in the center of east German cities beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is in stark contrast to the massive boulevard of Stalinallee. More walkable pedestrian areas in neighborhoods was not a uniquely East German idea. The new attraction to “premodern...multifunctional, pedestrian oriented, locally distinctive urban spaces” was also popular in the western Europe and North America and was championed by people like Jane Jacobs in New York City.⁷² The adoption of an older form of urbanism fits well into the reclamation of the *Kiez* as a basic building block of inner-city German neighborhoods.

Rehabilitation and revitalization of a limited number of neighborhoods in Berlin became linked to Honecker’s Housing Program. Part of Honecker’s called for the *Einheit von Neubau, Modernisierung und Erhaltung*, or the unity of new construction, modernization, and preservation was the renovation and construction of inner-city housing. The shortage of housing and a bad economy at the time contributed to a new found appreciation of, or perhaps resignation to, *Mietskaserne*, now associated with socialist ideas. Once the buildings were

⁷⁰ Ibid., 588.

⁷¹ Urban, 106.

⁷² Allinson., 588-9.

modernized with a kitchen, bathroom, and a toilet in each apartment, they were seen in a more positive way. East German planner, Ule Lamert said, “in light of the Marxist dialectic: The Renovation of the existing stock was not a solution borne out of a [lack of housing and economic pressure]; instead, modernization *transformed* the old buildings into exemplary ‘socialist residential complexes’”.⁷³ Once these *Mietskaserne* had been sanitized, remodeled, and upgraded, they would be fit for the socialist state and no longer reminders of the evils of capitalism. They would promote an active community life in the middle of the city. Although this is not strictly a socialist idea, it did have its roots in socialist movements of the pre-war period and in the aforementioned socialist rhetoric. After all, the *Mietskaserne* of Prenzlauer Berg had been a hotbed of socialist organizing in the first half of the twentieth century.

When it happened, renovation and construction changed the conditions in the *Mietskaserne*, and the urban fabric itself. There was a difference between the urbanism of the 1950s and 1960s that didn’t change until the 1970s. Urban argues that even though some of the outward forms of the past, like more stylized facades on buildings on newly constructed or renovated buildings, were embraced, the quality of life was drastically improved over life in pre-modernist *Mietskaserne*. The amenities in new and renovated buildings drastically changed the how people lived in these apartments. One no longer had to go into the courtyard to use the bathroom or into a shared bathroom between floors. Furthermore, standards of living had risen: few people were living in destitute poverty, and the gap between rich and poor in the GDR was less pronounced than it had been at the turn of the century. Last, although the

⁷³ Roland Strobel, “Before the Wall Came Tumbling down: Urban Planning Paradigm Shifts in a Divided Berlin, *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Sep., 1994): 33-4.

buildings had a semblance of historicity in their style and location in historic neighborhoods like Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte, the fabric of the urban was in fact different from that of neighborhoods filled with dark, damp tenements.⁷⁴ No more were these places of misery and destitution, but, ideally, they were the center of an active and engaged life in the city under the careful direction of the socialist state.

Political changes were taking place at this time as well. As the shift in thoughts about urban planning occurred, any Honecker and the SED completely abandoned the idea of a unified Germany.⁷⁵ When Honecker came to power in 1971, he announced the policy of *Abgrenzung*, or demarcation, from the west and the FRG, and this would ultimately lead to the GDR's recognition of itself as a single state separate from the West.⁷⁶ The result of this new policy towards reunification allowed the GDR and the SED to reclaim parts of Germany's, and specifically Berlin's, history in a more concrete way to further legitimize the East German socialist narrative based in history. Although this had happened before during the construction of Stalinallee, this was on a broader scale. The reclamation of German history took a few forms, notably in claiming known Prussian figures as socialist precursors and historicized architectural styles. The new definition of the GDR as its own nation, one separate from the Germany to the west, allowed the SED to reappropriate these figures and forms to create a newly historically rooted East German identity.

⁷⁴ Urban. 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁶ Alan Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Myth-Building in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989", *Central European History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1993): 106.

Of this shift in historic contextualization of the German past, Urban writes, “In the 1950s and 1960s, the socialist leaders had stressed the moment of rupture and renewal that according to them derived from the take-over of the working class and the establishment of a socialist society. In the 1980s, they accentuated the continuity of the ‘historic progress’ from capitalist to socialism, and the seed of the new social order in the old one”.⁷⁷ By this point in the history of GDR, they claimed figures like King Friedrich II, for example, who was seen as someone who promoted ideas of the enlightenment in Prussia that would ultimately lead to the rise of socialism. Architects like Schinkel, one of the inspirations for Stalinallee, were also seen in a favorable light once more after a hard turn towards modernist ideal in a post-Stalinist era.⁷⁸ Berlin plays a special role here, as well, because it was the East German capital and the historic capital of unified Germany. Therefore, the city and its historical and build past were seen as key East German identity: “the beating heart of the socialist German Democratic Republic, the pride of our socialist fatherland”.⁷⁹ The Heritage of the city as a source of legitimacy, especially over the West, is important. This is a great break in modernist ideals of construction and planning that characterized the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the supposedly blank slate that was Marzahn, and the hard break from historical Prussian styles and people.

Importantly, East Berlin could make a claim on being the more historic half of the divided city: the majority of historic buildings and monuments in the city existed on the Eastern side of the Berlin Wall. This allowed for the expansion of historicized architecture separate from the monotonous and more minimalist styles of modernist design. By 1976, the Politburo

⁷⁷ Urban, 15.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Pugh. 311.

declared that “building should be characteristic for the history and atmosphere of the city, the city districts and neighborhoods...in order to preserve or recreate the architecturally valuable of the past.”⁸⁰ Not only was the SED now committed to historicized building and architecture, but there were citizens of the GDR outside of government that advocated for more historical forms of architecture as well. They saw it as less monotonous, more lively, and more interesting.⁸¹ By this time in the GDR, there was a growing desire for something different, and that desire was expressed by embrace, in part, of older styles.

That is not to say that modernist architecture and *Plattenbauen* were abandoned in the GDR. They were still an efficient way to construct apartments in an economy where building had become highly industrialized to cheaply mass produce prefabricated housing. What begins to appear is a historicized and ornamented style in certain areas that used modified versions of the prefabricated concrete panels, the WBS 70, used to construct Marzahn. However, the concrete slabs used to construct the facades of the buildings contained more adornment and neo-historical features on the facades of buildings like bay windows and historicized balconies.⁸² It is significant that, although many new and renovated buildings were meant to look historical, they were simply a recreation or imitation of an 19th or early 20th century designs reconstructed with pre-fabricated panels and modernist technology. They did not require the same kind of skilled labor that was used to build Stalinallee or construct the buildings they were inspired by. This differentiates the historicized nature of Stalinallee, constructed using more traditional methods on a grand scale, and later, smaller historicized

⁸⁰ Urban, 16.

⁸¹ Ibid. 106.

⁸² Strobel, 33.

construction in Berlin. The layout of these projects themselves were completely different. The organizing principles is no longer the main thoroughfare, but the *Kiez*. The architecture is not meant to impress in the same way as Stalinalle, but to create a sense of the German past, pride in Berlin (and by extent the SED), Heimat, and, perhaps, nostalgia.

In 1982, the Politburo issued a resolution issued that effectively ended the construction of large settlements and satellite cities, like Marzahn, on the periphery of German cities. Within the cities themselves, apartment blocks would still be constructed of prefabricated materials, but they would be smaller than previous generations of *Plattenbauen*, seven instead of 11 stories, and they would be built with historicized facades on the block perimeter between existing *Mietskaserene*. The ground floor of these buildings often included a store, workshops, or even a backyard reminiscent of older forms of construction in the inner city.⁸³ These new historicized buildings were meant to guarantee “joy of life, aesthetic pleasure, social activity, and high performance” of life in neighborhoods.⁸⁴ These buildings were moving back towards the organizational and stylistic principles of life in the *Kiez*. Inner city neighborhoods would be communities on a more localized scale, not massive housing settlements or monumental boulevards. This would preserve the active social life of the neighborhood, while at the same time improving the living standards of residents.

Although Nikolaiviertel was not strictly a housing development, it would utilize the same technologies used to historicize, improve and revitalize the inner city neighborhoods of Berlin. It was reminiscent of this wider trend in apartment construction in the GDR and East

⁸³ Urban, 17.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 18.

Berlin. The project was built in the Mitte neighborhood, on the site of the city's historic center. The land that was once the center of the medieval old town was mostly vacant by the early 1980s. Much of it had been destroyed by bombing and fighting during World War II, and most of the remaining buildings on the site were cleared in the 1940s and 1950s.⁸⁵ There was some talk of putting up a modernist project in the area in the 1960s, but nothing ever came of those plans.⁸⁶ All that existed in Nikolaiviertel at the time were the ruins of the Nikolai Church, which would become the centerpiece of the new construction, and four historic buildings that avoided destruction in the war and the following decades. At the time, there were only twelve inhabited apartments in the remaining buildings.⁸⁷ Because the space was mostly empty, there was little problem constructing on the site and few people to relocate while the construction was ongoing. Although this land wasn't seen as particularly valuable for its historic past in previous decades, the aforementioned changes in attitude and policy towards historic forms of architecture and housing changed this outlook and provided incentive to build the Nikolaiviertel.

For the upcoming celebration, the SED and planners decided that they wanted to rebuild Berlin's medieval center. This idea was part of a push to make East Berlin a tourist destination for citizens of the GDR and foreign visitors, as well as "an attempt to strengthen its citizens' pride in and allegiance to the SED and to distinguish the GDR's capital from the 'other' Berlin".⁸⁸ The claims made by the project on the history of East Berlin are what distinguished

⁸⁵ Nothnagle, 108.

⁸⁶ Urban, 101.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁸ Pugh, 284.

the East from the 'other' Berlin.

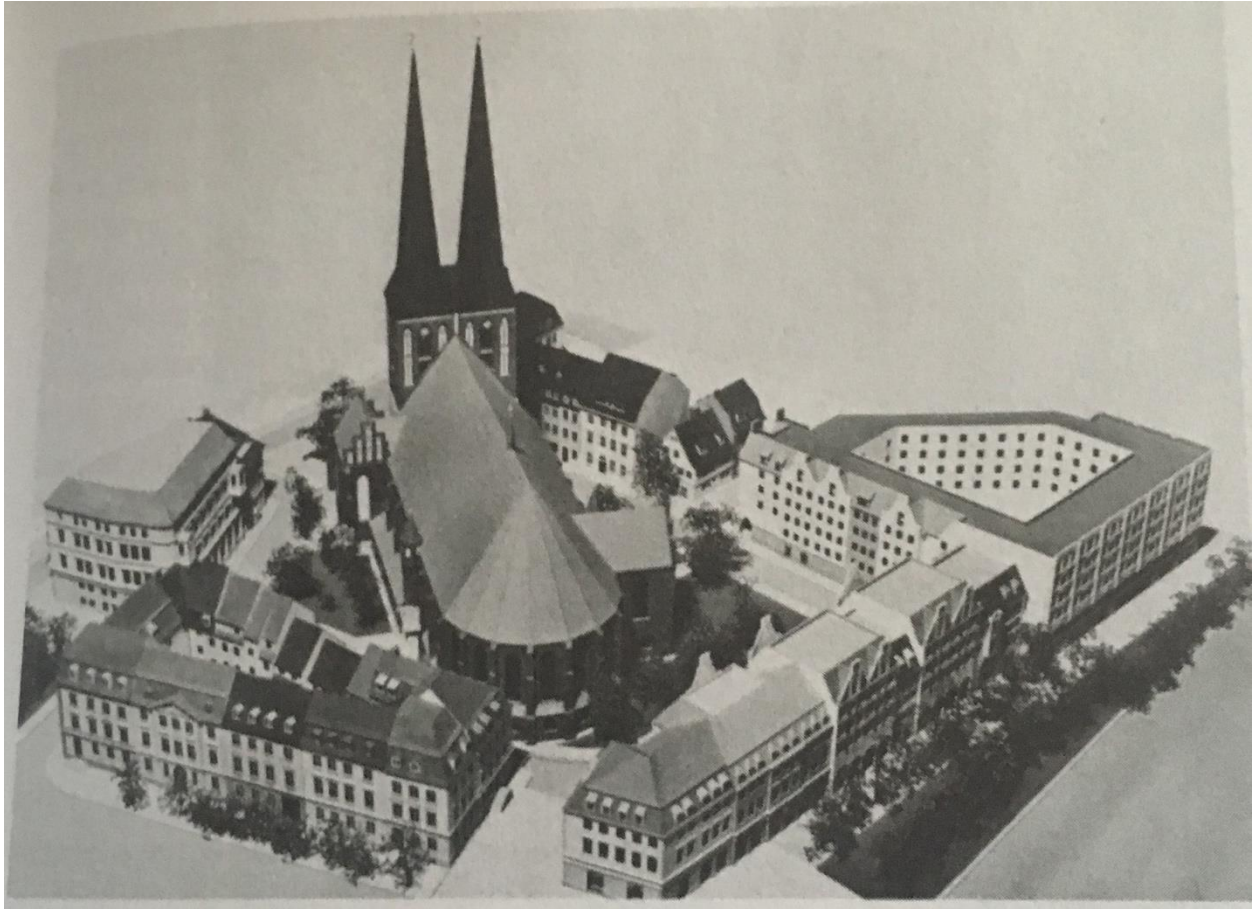


Figure 6: Model of Completed Nikolaiviertel, as built 1987. Photograph by Günther Stahn.

A few important things should be noted. First, as the 1980s progressed, the SED was slowly losing its grip on power, primarily because the GDR's economy was poor and there was limited access to, and availability of, consumer goods that east Germans desired. Although East Germany had the highest living standard of any country in the Eastern Block, 30% of the population (nearly 3 million people), were living at a subsistence level by the mid 1980s, and the only thing keeping the GDR's economy from collapsing were billions of deutsche marks in loans and credit from the Federal Republic of Germany in the west.⁸⁹ If the SED could create a

⁸⁹ Ibid., 285-6.

positive image for themselves by conjuring up notions of *Heimat* and German identity, than that was all the better for them to maintain power at home and appear strong and legitimate abroad.

Nikolaiviertel was a mixed use development designed by Günter Stahn. He had won a competition that called for designs for the Nikolaiviertel. It included reconstructed historic buildings and some new commercial and residential structures recreated with neo-historical facades. The project itself was a mix of modernist and historical styles and building technologies. The project was designed to function as an old town, not as an exact reconstruction of historic buildings and a historic neighborhood in Berlin. The plan had to meet certain requirements: the preservations of four old buildings that were already there, the reconstruction of the church, and the recreation of the small street system of the medieval heart of the city, and the recreation of a palace that was taken down in 1936.⁹⁰ These buildings had to be reconstructed or renovated with a high degree of historical accuracy and historical construction methods, however other buildings that were added to the project as shops, restaurants, and apartments were constructed using the prefabricated concrete *Platten* decorated in styles that ranged from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, depending on their location in the project.⁹¹

The center of the project was the Nikolai Church reconstructed nearly to its original form. It is worth noting because it provides a good argument for how historical tropes were adopted in the construction of the new *Kiez*. The church would be reconstructed and used as a local history

⁹⁰ Urban, 110.

⁹¹ Ibid., 122-3.

museum for the 750th anniversary celebrations. Officials claimed the church as “Berlin’s oldest building,” “origin of Berlin’s oldest settlement”, “a visible testament to historical context,”, and significantly, a “monument [that] documents the technical and artistic mastery of the working classes during the different epochs and periods of architectural development”.⁹² The use and rhetoric surrounding a religious building was redefined to fit a socialist narrative and claims for historical legitimacy by the SED. It celebrated Berlin’s history while at the same time celebrating the worker, linking the two ideas together through this structure.

Within Nikolaiviertel, eight hundred new apartments were constructed for two thousand residents. Of the eight hundred new apartments, most of which were studios, sixty were built in buildings in a traditional brick structure, while the rest were in buildings built from prefabricated slabs.⁹³ As such, the project was touted as part of the SED’s housing program, along with Marzahn, in celebration of Berlin’s anniversary.⁹⁴ The rest of the space included 1900 square meters of retail space, museums, and East Germany’s largest concentration of bars and restaurants. In less than half a square kilometer, the area Nikolaiviertel took up, there were eighteen bars and restaurants.⁹⁵ This new tiny neighborhood was designed to be an old historical *Kiez* on the site of Berlin’s medieval center. It was an area that was meant to make Germans nostalgic for the past, foster pride in East Berlin’s architectural heritage, and set the roots for East German socialist identity in “progressive” figures of the past.

⁹² Ibid., 122.

⁹³ Ibid., 100-1.

⁹⁴ Pugh, 320.

⁹⁵ Urban., 101.

Honecker himself was not particularly interested in architecture, rather he was interested in the number of units that could be built to fulfill the goals of his Housing Construction Program. He did, however, see the value in Nikolaiviertel and its historicized architecture in his claim for nationhood as a draw for western tourists, an important supply of cash at the time, while at the same time supporting the GDR's desire for independence, *Abgrenzung*, connected to particular portions of German history.⁹⁶ This represents a mix of the historical and the modern.

It was both a practical and economic necessity. It would have been far too costly and time consuming to reconstruct everything in a historical style. Furthermore, in order to have some of the buildings farther towards the edges of the project, especially buildings facing the very modern Alexanderplatz, they had a more modernist and slightly less historicized look.⁹⁷ Nikolaiviertel was a mix of styles and building technologies all in the name of appearance. In this way it would draw tourists (and foreign cash critical for the GDR at this time), and, as had been stated before, provide the SED a claim on the deep historical roots of socialism in East Berlin. Nikolaiviertel was not a true *Kiez*, but pretended to be one for political and economic purposes. Although it is a very specific prestige project, it is perhaps illustrative of a larger trend in planning and construction in East Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is difficult to say what effect the trend of historicism, the embrace of the *Mietskaserne*, and the *Kiez* had on the average East German's identity. Strengthening social ties in central neighborhoods in East Berlin is important, but perhaps it isn't something that had

⁹⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 120.

ever disappeared. However, the mobilization of historicism by the SED does have more to say about what they saw as valuable in the identity of East Germany. Mainly, this is connected to claims of legitimacy through historical figures, places, and buildings. If an embrace of older forms of housing can help along the program, that also works in the favor of the party. However, even with efforts to continue building and reconstruct, to provide materials and consumer goods to citizens, to maintain their power and control over East Germany, the Berlin Wall would come down on November 9, 1989, effectively ending the GDR.

Conclusion: Housing, Architecture, and East German Identity

As 1990 approached, and before the wall fell, it was becoming abundantly clear that Honecker would not meet its goal of building 3 million new apartments. The housing problem in the GDR had not been solved, and there were still thousands of people in East Berlin and the rest of the country waiting for new and adequate housing. While the SED did make strides towards addressing a shortage of housing in the GDR, Honecker's goal ultimately wasn't met. However, the story of housing in East Berlin provides another side to the way life in the GDR is typically talked about or looked at. It provides a look both at the everyday lives and concerns of many East Germans, as well as the political, economic, and policy issues that the leaders of the country were dealing with. Architecture and housing become an expression of the state of GDR at individual point in time during its existence.

Berlin itself illustrates the changes and struggles faced by the SED and the citizens of the GDR to meet certain goals and living standards. As the capital of East Germany and a centerpiece in the Cold War, the city did receive more funds and attention than other areas of the GDR, however that provides a unique view into what the SED thought was important and useful for the socialist nation. Housing in the GDR was closely linked to the success or failure of the SED, especially in the Honecker years. The three projects and eras discussed in this thesis all have to do with the establishment of power and definition of identity by the SED as well as attempts to construct a distinctly Socialist East German identity. Although the styles change over time and accepted policy soon gets rejected—the embrace of Soviet Socialist Realism and

the rejection of Modernism, to Modernism's acceptance as the most suitable form of socialist building, to a rediscovery a bit later of historicized styles implemented through modernist buildings techniques. All the while, the SED was trying to create a narrative through built space about what it meant to be a socialist, as far as their definition went, in the GDR.

Changing socialist identities and claims of legitimacy in the GDR are summed up well by Alan Nothnagle within the context of "myth building". He writes,

...[T]he myth cannot just be *made*, it must also be *built*: one stone on top of the other, through national monument, school texts, festivals and holidays, and a variety of other media. "Myth-building" describes the process by which the SED and its subordinate institutions consciously and systematically redefined events, institutions and individuals from the common German past as a part of a strategy to cultivate a distinctive and politically expedient historical consciousness for the common German future...Nevertheless, the SED's permanent legitimacy crisis led it to a search for roots...Because of the artificiality of the GDR's border, and the impromptu manner in which it and its institutions came into being, myth-building and historical consciousness were crucial elements of the GDR's ambiguous national identity and hence were essential to its very survival as an independent state.⁹⁸

Although Nagel is not specifically talking about the architecture of housing and planning in East Berlin, what he writes is relevant to this work. The SED was constantly searching for legitimacy, and it becomes evident over time that they used housing to define and redefine what they believed socialist identity should look like in a German context.

Stalinallee was important in myth-building because it established Berlin as a center important to the GDR and the SED. Stalinallee laid the groundwork, in some ways, for future projects and how they could function to define and redefine East German identity. Although it is not a concept created in the GDR, Stalinallee showed how identity might be created and

⁹⁸ Alan Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Myth-Building in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989", *Central European History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1993), 93-5.

imposed through the built environment. However the project may have failed to truly create “palaces for the workers” or a reclamation of bourgeois or ruling class spaces for the worker, but it did show how the SED could base their legitimacy in the monumental and historical architecture of the project.

Marzahn marked another change in policy in the GDR. Not only does it display the shift away from Soviet Socialist architecture to modernism, but it also show a reframing of what was important at the time period. This is the construction of mass housing to address problems, but also place the family, and specifically children, at the center of their socialist ideology. It took the subject and moved them into a place that was supposedly devoid of history or meaning that wasn’t intended by the SED and the state. It is a prime example of Honecker’s Housing Construction Program. Although Stalinallee and Marzahn were both prestige projects, the former seems to glorify skilled labor and the power of the state, while the latter places more importance on the individual as a part of a socialist community.

Finally, the embrace of historic architecture, *Mietskaserne*, and the *Kiez* provides a slightly different story. The adoption of historic styles using modernist methods creates an interesting narrative. There are two sides here. First, it addresses a practical need for housing and a desire by citizens of the GDR to embrace historic styles. Second, the SED is once again able to practice “myth-making” in calling on historical figures, buildings, and places to call themselves the legitimate and rightful rulers of Germany in the historic German capital. By extension, this legitimizes the identity of East Germans as both socialist and distinctly German. Nikolaiviertel is a great example of this myth-making. It was a mash-up of disparate styles and

building techniques, but ended up being uniquely East German. It is less an identity of the individual in the society, but claiming a broader identity for all.

Both the architecture of housing and how the SED used it to define German identity or provide legitimacy for itself changed over the forty years in which the GDR was in existence. However, what is clear is that housing was an important part of how the SED measured success and promoted itself among both East Germans and those abroad. Both practical concerns about addressing issues related to housing as well as international concerns influenced the Path the SED took towards Housing the GDR, and each step was consequential for how east German identities were defined and expressing through built space.

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Figure 6: Model of Nikolaiviertel as built, 1987. Photograph by Günther Stahn. In Neo-Historical East Berlin: Architecture and Urban Design in the German Democratic Republic 1970-1990. By Florian Urban. Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009, 117.

Figure 1: Photo of Stalinallee. Bundesarchiv, DH1/22396, 3 von 4.

Figure 2: Stairwell Plan and Profile of Apartment Building at Stalinallee. Bundesarchiv, DH 2/21836, 3 von 4.

Figure 3: Stalinallee Floor Plan. Bundesarchiv, DH 2/21836, 1 von 9.

Figure 7: Sample Designs WBS 70: Variant 1 - Young Married Couple With a Child.
Bundesarchiv, DH1/22396, 3 von 4.

Figure 5: Sample Design WBS 70: Variant 2 – An Apartment for Three People. Bundesarchiv, DH1/22396, 3 von 4.

Literature Review

This chapter will contain a literature review of the secondary sources used in this thesis. These are primarily sources dealing with housing and architecture in Berlin during the Cold War. They range from texts on specific projects to greater overviews of the economic and housing situations of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). This chapter will provide a brief summary of all or parts of each text, their argument, and, finally, how they are intended to fit into my larger narrative of housing in Cold War Berlin. The primary texts included are *Berlin: Divided City 1945-1989*, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany*, *Neo-historical East Berlin: Architecture and Urban Design in the German Democratic Republic*, and *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin*. Other shorter secondary texts are used in the Thesis as well, however, these books are the most important secondary sources.

Berlin: Divided City 1945-1989 - Edited by Philip Broadbent and Sabine Hake

Berlin: Divided City 1945-1989 is a collection of essays. It contains one essay in particular that provides a solid cultural context for Stalinallee. This essay, titled “The Nylon Curtain: Architectural Unification in Divided Berlin”, discusses the Interbau project at Hansaviertel (a modernist building exposition) in West Berlin and Stalinallee in the East. The author of this section, Greg Castillo, argues that the permeable border between East and West Berlin before the Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961 allowed

for a trade in architectural ideas, one that would ultimately result in the adoption of certain Western Modernist ideas in the GDR. The author identifies this exchange as “cross cultural voyeurism”.⁹⁹ This “cross cultural voyeurism” also includes accounts of propaganda coming from both the East and the West criticizing the work of the other side’s flagship project. The authors characterize Interbau and Stalinallee as a symbol of western power and “East Germany’s ultimate marketing tool”, respectively.¹⁰⁰ In other words, each project was intended to send both a political and social message to the people of the GDR and the FRG, as well as the international community, to signal the superiority of either East or West. In terms of architectural styles this meant Modernism in the West and Soviet Socialist Realism in the East. Interestingly, the author quotes György Péteri to end the essay: “the rebellious project of socialism not only failed to be ‘antimodern’ (which it never wished to be), but it also failed to provide a workable way toward an *alternative* modernity. It lost the race for modernity as it failed to assert its systematic exceptionalism by way of offering viable alternatives for everyday life.”¹⁰¹ In this way, the author provides an ultimate critique of East German socialism beginning with Stalinallee, and East German modes of expression of identity through architecture and housing, and ending with the fall of the Berlin Wall: although the GDR adopted modernist building practices, they failed to achieve the goal of socialist utopia and, ultimately, ceased to exist.

⁹⁹Greg Castillo, “The Nylon Curtain: Architectural Unification in Divided Berlin,” in *Berlin Divided City, 1945-1989*, (Berghan Books, 2011), 47.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 48-49.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 54.

This text provides a solid background on Stalinallee. It complicates the typical narrative of a solid East and West divide and provides a glimpse into architectural and political life of Berlin before the construction of the Wall. It also foreshadows later developments within GDR housing policy- mainly the construction of modular, Modernist influenced housing. Furthermore, the essay is concise, informative, and goes beyond the architectural features of the individual projects into the political and social significance behind them.

Amnesiopolis: Modernity Space and Memory in East Germany by Eli Rubin

The next core piece of literature is *Amnesiopolis: Modernity Space and Memory in East Germany* by Eli Rubin. It is an account of Marzahn, a housing project on the north-east edge of East Berlin. The author not only discusses Marzahn in terms of the DDR's turn towards modernist housing, in the introduction he introduces it as a new, "truly socialist" form of housing as opposed to earlier construction projects like Stalinallee.¹⁰² In the author's own reckoning, Marzahn is different because it was a totally new place removed from historically populated centers. The DDR was able to build a totally new housing complex on the edge of the city that was nearly a city in itself. In doing so, the GDR is creating a place of erasure: Marzahn removes people from their homes in the center of the city and brings them to the edge of the metropolis, it removes the historical context of the city, and erases the cultural memory of the past

¹⁰² Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

for better or for worse. However, Marzahn and, other housing projects like it, were intended to address the lack of suitable housing in the GDR. In the 1970s and 1980s these prefabricated Plattenbauten were a large improvement in accommodations for many people. It was a radically new way to house the working people of East Germany. However, Rubin's discussion does not only include a discussion of this new form of building and the erasure of memory, the creation of an "amnesiopolis", it was also deeply intertwined with the state. One review of the book sums it up nicely: "...these chapters offer new insight into the physical, sensual and ideological realities of life in large-scale Plattenbausiedlung of the late 1970s and 1980s: one which held the utopian promise of socialism in so many ways, yet which also nurtured the dystopian world of surveillance".¹⁰³

For me, this provides an interesting contrast to Stalinallee. Instead of building a monumental prestige project at the center of the city (one that ultimately ended up housing the elite of the SED), Marzahn was also a prestige project, but more so it was a resettlement of the working class, even within a socialist context, to the edge of the city. Furthermore, it is a useful account of the lived experience of this newer form of architecture and housing. Again, in contrast to Stalinallee, the effect of the housing isn't to promote a socialist German identity that distances itself from the National Socialist past of the earlier part of the twentieth century, but to completely erase it as a whole, only leaving room for a socialist, East German identity in a surveillance state. This source

¹⁰³ Saunders, A. "Review – Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space and Memory in East Germany". *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (October 2016), 770-772.

provides a good way to get into the lived experience of this form of housing in the GDR through an apparently well researched source.

Neo-Historical East Berlin: Architecture and Urban Design in the German Democratic Republic 1910-1990 by Florian Urban

Urban adds an interesting twist to the story of East German architecture in Berlin in his book. Although not specifically housing related, he traces a trend of neo-historicism in architecture in the later period of the GDR. As the East had once turned away from neo-classical Soviet Socialist Realism towards modernism, they again turned towards a neo-historical style. However, this style, Urban argues, was not an accurate historical reconstruction of “Old Berlin”, although it was intended to invoke a feeling of historicism. Furthermore, this neo-historical architecture was often constructed with some of the same methods used in the construction of Plattenbauten housing like prefabricated concrete. The author focuses on individual locations in Berlin, for example, Nikolaiviertel “prefab old town”, Prenzlauer Berg, and Platz der Akademie, now Gendarmenmarkt. These neo-historical projects were often seen as prestige projects, and provide an interesting contrast to both Stalinallee and the Plattenbauten of other parts of the city. Deborah Ascher Barnstone of Washington state University eloquently summarizes an important point in Urban’s argument. She writes,

“One of the most interesting portions of the book is Urban’s discussion of aesthetics in the socialist state, especially the belief that good aesthetics would naturally result from buildings designed to improve the living conditions of the proletariat. He traces subtle shifts in this logic that allowed architects to adjust from the modern to historicist idiom, including the growing belief in the

importance of communicative design, a credo used by postmodernists in the West.”¹⁰⁴

This is a key development in the evolution of architectural thought and practice in the GDR.

The focus on individual areas of Berlin, as well as Urban’s discussion of how architecture functions within a state, especially a socialist state, to send a message about social and political values will be important for my overall argument about the development of East German architecture and housing. The Author’s Chapter on Nikolaiviertel, supplemented by other sections of the book, also provides an interesting contrast in the development of East German Housing. The story of the history of renovated housing and the political decisions that lead to that development are an interesting and important part of the overall narrative of housing and identity in East Berlin.

Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin by Emily Pugh

Pugh’s book is a discussion of identity in divided Berlin. At the very beginning of the book she poses the question, “...how were East and West German national identities—identities distinct from and in dialectical opposition to one another—created *despite* a shared history and cultural heritage...how did East and West Berlin’s dual identities (that is, the urban image each possessed) function in relation to the national German identity

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Ascher, Barnstone.. “Review -- Neo-historical East Berlin: Architecture and Urban Design in the German Democratic Republic 1910-1990 by Florian Urban”. German Studies Review, Vol. 34, No. 2 (May 2011), 438-439.

and the dual political identities?”.¹⁰⁵ She sets out to answer this question through an analysis of built space in Cold War Berlin and argues that Berlin, on both sides of the wall and in multiple eras, was constructed to be a site of national identity through architectural style. The author uses specific case studies to make her greater point about national identity on both sides of the Wall in Berlin. Significantly, she contrasts *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday history) with the official stance of the government in the East, especially because of the importance of the official positions of the GDR in the West. Significant for the topics covered in this thesis are chapters 1, 3, 7. These chapters deal with Interbau and Stalinallee, the construction of housing to improve moral within the East Germany and promote the GDR’s image abroad, and, finally, the construction of more housing and prestige projects, like the neo-historical Nikolaiviertel, in East Berlin, respectively. Pugh’s book is a new, important, and well researched addition to the existing literature on identity, politics, and architecture in Cold War Berlin. These chapters will help inform the overall argument of the thesis, as well as provide a new perspective and some background on identity and politics in a divided Berlin. The examples provided by Pugh in her work also provide different angles from the other sources previously described in this chapter. In this way, this book provides one more angle or argument to critique or supplement my own in the greater narrative of housing in Cold War Berlin.

¹⁰⁵ Pugh, Emily. *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* by Emily Pugh, 1.